

1911-2007: Chinese immigration in France



Échanges et Mouvement describe and analyse immigration from China, and Chinese migrant workers in France from before World War I until today.

Evolution and general situation of immigration in France

France was a land for immigration for a long time.¹ Before WWI, it also became the first nation to establish bureaucratic control of its population through identity cards and to define a specific model of controlled immigration capable of responding to the rigidity of the labour market.² After the [Paris Commune](#) of 1871, the basic interior policy of the French bourgeoisie was to avoid an exodus from rural areas in order to maintain the political support of peasants and the middle class, counterbalancing and containing the dangerous proletarian class. At the time this immigration policy was the contrary of, for instance, the US policy, which aimed at populating empty territories, or the British policy, which through drastic measures (the enclosures) obliged peasants to become industrial workers. Since then it has remained the core of successive French immigration policies. The first law on immigration defining such a policy was voted as early as in 1880.³

Despite these bureaucratic tendencies to manage and control immigration, an accurate estimation of the different currents of immigration was and still is difficult: one of the main reasons is the impossibility to stop people moving uncontrolled through the French terrestrial borders (flat or mountainous territories practically without natural obstacles). Therefore all the figures we will give in this text have to be taken critically, the actual number of illegal immigrants being of course impossible to know.

This remark is certainly even truer for Chinese immigration in France, because it didn't and doesn't fit into the government policy defined above for controlled immigration, and because of its specific characteristics of strong family or regional connections which allows these immigrants to partly escape the usual problems of illegal immigrants. Considering the number of immigrants in France for a century, Chinese immigration has not been on that large a scale, and it hasn't followed the same pace as immigration by other groups. As a whole, general immigration grew up quickly just after WWI and WW II to compensate for



1911-2007: Chinese immigration in France

Échanges et Mouvement describe and analyse immigration from China, and Chinese migrant workers in France from before World War I until today.

Evolution and general situation of immigration in France France was a land for immigration for a long time.¹ Before WWI, it also became the first nation to establish bureaucratic control of its population through identity cards and to define a specific model of controlled immigration capable of responding to the rigidity of the labour market.² After the Paris Commune of 1871, the basic interior policy of the French bourgeoisie was to avoid an exodus from rural areas in order to maintain the political support of peasants and the middle class, counterbalancing and containing the dangerous proletarian class. At the time this immigration policy was the contrary of, for instance, the US policy, which aimed at populating empty territories, or the British policy, which through drastic measures (the enclosures) obliged peasants to become industrial workers. Since then it has remained the core of successive French immigration policies. The first law on immigration defining such a policy was voted as early as in 1880.³

Despite these bureaucratic tendencies to manage and control immigration, an accurate estimation of the different currents of immigration was and still is difficult: one of the main reasons is the impossibility to stop people moving

uncontrolled through the French terrestrial borders (flat or mountainous territories practically without natural obstacles). Therefore all the figures we will give in this text have to be taken critically, the actual number of illegal immigrants being of course impossible to know.

This remark is certainly even truer for Chinese immigration in France, because it didn't and doesn't fit into the government policy defined above for controlled immigration, and because of its specific characteristics of strong family or regional connections which allows these immigrants to partly escape the usual problems of illegal immigrants. Considering the number of immigrants in France for a century, Chinese immigration has not been on that large a scale, and it hasn't followed the same pace as immigration by other groups. As a whole, general immigration grew up quickly just after WWI and WW II to compensate for

the stagnation of the population, in response to a shortage of agricultural and industrial labour aggravated by the casualties of wars. The importance of this immigration can be given by the fact that today, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the present population is issued from immigration (about 15 million). By some estimates about 1 million of these French residents are of Asian origin, of whom $\frac{2}{3}$

would be of Chinese origin. To give a comparison, during the century up to 1996 more than 4

million Italians settled in France. According to some official estimates 450.000 Chinese live in France, plus more than 50 000 illegal immigrants (in fact more than 100 000: in 2003, 22

000 asked officially for asylum), with an estimated 6 000 more crossing the borders every year. According to the Council of Europe, in 2000 Europe counted 200 000 documented and between 600 000 and 900 000 undocumented Chinese immigrants, most of them in France.

The vanguard of temporary immigrants: training Chinese intellectuals in western democracy

Chinese immigration was not intentionally encouraged and was not at all organised except during WW1. Apart from this exception, it was more of an opportunistic phenomenon, a consequence of political events according to their origin, their location and their economic activities. Because of these

characteristics, until recently the different waves of Chinese immigration in France did not mix together, just as they did not mix with other immigrants or with the French population.

Before WWI, the low number of Chinese living in France can't be called immigration. A 1911 census estimates the number at 283, most of them students. They were sent to be trained for democracy – western style - by Sun Yat Sen, after the proclamation of the Chinese Republic. Although the monarchy was re-established in China in 1916, the Society for Franco-Chinese Education was established and lasted until 1921, sending students to France.

Most of them were young intellectuals from the middle class; in France they were "worker-students" either in Paris or in some other towns in the country (400 stayed in a small town south east of Paris working in a rubber company).⁴ When they lost all financial support in 1921, most of them went back to China but some settled in France (500 perhaps).

There was in fact another less evident source of immigration from China to Europe including France. Although if it was of limited importance at the time, it was the beginning of what became one of the most important immigration flows, consisting chiefly of immigration from the Wenzhou region. In 1876, several foreign countries including France obliged China to sign an agreement opening five Chinese ports to international trade. Wenzhou (about 150 km south of Shanghai) was one of these ports, and the business men of the region used this facility to send to Europe some 3 to 4 000 tradesmen to sell stone sculptures produced in Qingtian (60 km from Wenzhou). It was the first permanent channel for immigration to France.

Sold to support the war effort in Europe: cheated volunteers have to "work" under bombing

Another very different instance cannot be regarded as immigration, but in a certain way can be considered the involuntary beginning of the first wave of immigrants. These Chinese workers were recruited in China during WWI, theoretically as agricultural or industrial workers to replace French workers mobilised in the war. They were enrolled separately by the French and British government after an agreement with the Chinese government in 1916.

They were supposed to be 25 -35 years old and be fit for hard working; they

would have to stay for 5 years; they would be paid and given free passage back to China.⁵ 150 000 young Chinese came to France; most of them were assigned to very dangerous work connected to the war: industrial production of explosives or bombs, rebuilding roads and railways near the front line, clearing corpses, wounded and mines from the battlefield, etc. Some of them would even be incorporated into fighting units in spring 1918. There is a total silence on the

strikes and mutinies by these workers, who were angry because of these broken promises; for instance, the fights of Chinese dockers in Dunkirk left several killed: in Le Creusot there was a strike and an incident in an ammunition factory. Most of the workers were parked in something akin to concentration camps. Quite a lot were killed, some other died of diseases, mainly from the flu epidemic at the end of the war.⁶ Then they were sent back to China in 1919, but some managed to stay in France (perhaps 3 000).

These "survivors" of the "war effort" managed to settle in a small district near the Gare de Lyon station from where they would have taken the train to Marseille – the port to sail to China. This small district of slums was then called "Châlons Island" or "Chinese district".

They were soon followed between 1925 and 1935 by some "real" immigrants coming mainly from the Chinese province of Zhejiang (on the east coast in central China), especially from the town of Wenzhou, certainly through family connections; these newcomers were pushed to immigrate because of a small economic crisis in this district. Most of them were industrial workers, the same kind of job they could have performed during the war. But the economic crisis of the 30's obliged them to find other means of surviving (certainly as foreigners they were the first ones to be fired and some were sent back in full trains to their country). The Chinese had to resort to the kind of work they were used to in China: selling goods in the streets or peddling, generally imported goods from Japan distributed by Jewish wholesalers settled in the III district of Paris. As the Jews were deported by the Nazis during WWII, there is some suspicion that some of these Chinese used this opportunity (pushed as well by the necessity) to take the place of their providers. What is sure is that their material condition was transformed and somewhat improved. Anyway just after WWII, most of them had moved from their previous settlement to this III district of Paris (Arts et Métiers district). They moved also to another production of all kinds of items in leather or plastic leather substitutes, establishing workshops, wholesale and retail shops in the area. Some even moved into garment production. Some of them

were the boss, some others were workers in small workshops. A complete economic structure was built, then, in which we could find, coming from the same Chinese region small businesses, shopkeepers, workers exploited in small workshops as well as craftsmen or home-workers.

This situation lasted after WWI, in spite of the chaos arising from the fighting inside China and the Japanese invasion, because in any case Wenzhou remained an "open port" according to the international agreement; the political instability and bloody repression pushed more people on the way to immigration through this Chinese region. But the Chinese conquest by the Communist Party of China in 1949 meant the closure of all the borders and of course of the ports. Chinese immigration was practically stopped up to 1978. From this point it started again but more for economic than political reasons.

So through the continuation of the same development of strong and tight clan and family relations, new Chinese immigrants from Zhejiang (most of the Wenzhou district) came in a regular flow to be exploited in these workshops and trade. The III district (Arts et Métiers) expanded up to the North and East following specific streets (rue du Temple, then rue du Faubourg du Temple up to Belleville and boulevard Voltaire –X and XI districts) and from the nearest railways stations (Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est) up to the North East and East suburbs of Paris. Quite a lot of the small sweatshops moved in these suburbs where the police and labour controls were less tight than in the inner city and with a loose and discreet neighbourhood. The "Wenzhou" as they are called numbered 20 000 in 1974. Now there would be between 60 000 and 100 000 of them (1/3 perhaps of illegal immigrants). As we will see with the other immigration waves, in order both to provide services to their community and to expand their economic activities, "to a certain extent the Wenzhou left their economic traditional field to invest in restaurants, food, jewelry, etc., sectors where they

were in competition, perhaps mixed with the other immigrants waves. The garment, restaurant and leather and plastic goods businesses are usually called in the Chinese milieu

"The Three Knives». Today, this "Wenzhou" immigration is becoming more important, draining people from the near provinces and expanding its territory in the Parisian district.

Accordingly, if they are the most important part of the Chinese immigration in France, they are also, as a whole, the poorest one, harshly exploited in their own community by bosses coming from the same province.

A refuge for Chinese people from South-East Asia fleeing war and political repression The second wave of Chinese immigrants was very different from the first. They are called "

teochew" in connection with the Chaozhou dialect spoken in the part of Guangdong which they came from a long time ago. In a certain way, it was a consequence of the de-colonisation and of the coming to power of the Communist Party in China and in Vietnam. These people fled the wars or the threat of ethnic repression connected with the domination of the Communist Party in mainland China. It started around 1955 with people from the South East Asian Chinese Diaspora fleeing all the disturbed countries of South East Asia (mainly Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia but also from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand or inland China).

Most of them were not "poor people" moving for economic reasons but for political ones and fear of ostracism. Part of them had some money and they were already involved in some trade connections in their original country. It is difficult to tell if they were given, in addition to political support as victims of war and of "communism", more material facilities to settle in France than other immigrants, but the fact is they could quickly settle in another specific district of Paris, the XIII district which is now called the "Choisy triangle" (from the name of the main street of the district) or again "China town". In the 60's and 70's, this former very industrial and working class district was totally restructured: industries have moved elsewhere and instead huge towers of flats (the architectural concept of the time) were built.

It was a social failure and the coming of these immigrants gave the immigrants and the government the opportunity to fill these almost empty new buildings: some of these immigrants could buy their flats (some speculating on that basis), others have to rent; quite a lot of shops or rooms were convenient for any kind of small trade or workshop.

These new Chinese immigrants didn't come all together at once but according to the political and military events of the South-East Asia. The first ones came after France evacuating Indochina in 1954-1955, the second wave after US troops

evacuated Vietnam in 1975; after that others succeed in fleeing their country: they were the famous "boat people", some coming from inland China following the vicissitudes of the Communist Party domination. So this population was rather socially heterogeneous: if some had some money, entrepreneurial minds and experience of commerce, some others had to be workers and have to pile up in small flats up to 8 to 10 in a small room, obliged to be exploited by the first group under any conditions. Because of such a local concentration of socially structured Chinese society, the district became a real town with all facilities for this Chinese community, attracting a Chinese population from other surrounding districts of Paris (and new immigrants) as well as a French population looking for "exoticism". Chinese as well as non Chinese can find there all the necessities for a "Chinese" life: not only the traditional shops but also banks, doctors, lawyers, travel agencies, etc., even Chinese supermarkets, Chinese mafia gangs and local newspaper in Chinese. In the back ground are more and more sweatshops, not only providing what was needed for all these trades but also working for outside districts, mainly for the garment industry.

The "Choisy Triangle" expanded in the nearby suburbs of Choisy, Ivry and Vitry (south-east of Paris), and to some extent integrated the third wave of immigrants because, as the first one, it was already strongly structured. Of course most of these new comers were overexploited

workers. The French authorities did not intervene in this district as they did in other Chinese districts of Paris in the hunt to undocumented Chinese immigrants: they rely, for peace and control in this "China town", on this ad hoc organisation which had been build by the Chinese community itself.

A very different third wave of Chinese immigrants...

... more similar to the great number of immigrants coming from other countries. Contrary to the two first waves of immigrants, this third one was not structured: it was more heterogeneous and has often had to look for integration into the existing Chinese communities, sometimes with some problems of discrimination. Quite a lot of them have a different regional origin and a different social background. Essentially they were victims of the industrial restructuring in today's China and were not fleeing their country for political reasons but, as is generally true of most immigrants coming to France, for economic reasons.

Most of them came from the North of China (hence they were given the name "Dongbei" –

north east in Chinese). Chiefly from Liaoning and Jilin (formerly Manchuria), old industrial provinces (heavy industries), they were more educated than the peasants from Zhejiang and had performed in China functions like technicians, clerks, foremen, etc.. The number of immigrants coming from other parts of China but mostly from the Wenzhou province is also taking more importance, diversifying Chinese immigration as a whole, with a tendency towards domination by the "Wenzhou" immigrants. Of course even if they came to France with some money, they were nonetheless obliged to take any job for survival, very far from their previous qualification in China (some women even have to resort to prostitution).

Geographically, in Paris, contrary to the previous immigrants, they could be found in all the previous Chinese locations, though a lot settled around Belleville or the corresponding suburbs where they found themselves in competition with the "Wenzhou". Perhaps more than others immigrants, because they had no clan or family connections, they were easier prey for the sweatshops of the other communities. Their have come increasingly since the 80s but in more significant numbers recently, even if it is difficult to estimate their number. What looks certain is that they are the main victims of the police hunt for undocumented immigrants as they are not "protected" by their community.

So, more than previous immigrants, all the new Chinese immigrants are doomed to become workers for the earlier-settled Chinese workshops in France and for those who, for various reasons have had the opportunity to be entrepreneurs, often connected with trade networks either in mainland China or in South East Asia and able to exploit this proletariat as the essential element or the complement of their global commerce. With the growing number of immigrants, we can see Chinese immigrants, both old and new, taking the kind of commerce deserted by the French for various reasons, because they have to work harder, longer hours for less money (cafés with tobacco shops, restaurants, garment import-export trade connected to sweatshops having to adapt to the mainland Chinese competition. Of course they can expand in such a way, on one hand because they can get money through the usual Chinese credit connections, on the other hand they can easily find amongst the new immigrants the labour obliged to accept to work harder and harder to make the business profitable.⁷ Exactly as they come to invade certain sectors of the economy, their growing number needs

to expand into to new locations, outside Paris because of the cost of accommodation: recently, Chinese immigrants can be seen in the North and North east suburbs of Paris (Aubervilliers , La Courneuve..) where the recent riots have created a "void" from inhabitants fleeing because of insecurity: it is certain that in such locations life is harder and it is difficult to know how these Chinese newcomers will be welcomed in these Babel towers. Some inquiry tried to find out what, in the recent period, was pushing these Chinese to immigration. They were separated into three categories:

- tao zhai : escape the debts

- tao hun : emigrate after a divorce

- tao jin : sieving gold (meaning looking abroad for a better living condition) As everywhere in the world, "recruitment" of immigrants can point to a wide range of possibilities, besides the "voluntary" immigrants (not so voluntary because they are pushed by personal, often social problems); some could be lured by the mirage offered by immigrants already in France, or by people belonging to a recruitment network for business in France (personal contacts or ads in local papers for instance). Cheating vulnerable people is not the only way: threats, blackmail, kidnapping could be seen as well. Anyway, these immigrants have to yield to the common fate of immigrants from everywhere But, for all these people, notwithstanding their hopes, their situation more or less corresponded to the different ways of coming to France. Some lucky ones could come directly by plane having got a tourist visa and the required money for such a travel. Most, however, have to resort to the usual network of illegal immigration, most of the time international gangs. The networks for people leaving from the North of China differed from those for emigrants from the South. The latter have to follow individual networks often connected to clan or family connections. The former have to go to specialised companies where, like at a travel agency, you can "buy" the passage to France. (For instance, in 1998 the French police discovered 18 international networks shuttling illegal immigrants to France).

But for both categories, travel to France is a real ordeal.⁸ Nobody knows in advance what countries they will cross (according to the efficiency of repression and control the initial itinerary could be changed, for instance now Chinese immigrants could come through Africa), how long it will take, even if they will ever arrive in the Promised Land; they could be robbed of all their money and belongings, beaten, starved for days, raped if women..., their family could be

blackmailed for more money(4). They are constantly in a very vulnerable situation.

Working in France: sweatshops and Co.

Like many other immigrants, the Chinese have to take three different kinds of trips to get to their destination. They can be classified according the danger they involved:

- the direct trip with a tourist or commercial visa (a true or a fake one) by plane, the least dangerous but the most expensive
- the "parachute" trip which means coming into any country in the Schengen territory with a passport (true or fake) and from there getting to the right country
- "pa shan" (climb the mountain) with a long trip by land by any means of land transport in the hand of "guides" , the real masters of everything

This problem of money can be a heavy burden. If they had to borrow money before leaving to pay the "travel" or if they have paid only part of this cost, they have to pay the remaining debt with free work, only provided sometimes with food and accommodation (both often not even the strict minimum). There are examples, discovered by chance, of Chinese immigrants held prisoners in hidden workshops where they have to work hard for years in order to repay their debt, of course at the mercy of their "employer". The gangs pressuring them this way could also threaten the family in China. Of course omerta is the rule and revenge could be awful.

So, once they are in France, the ordeal is not over for most of them: not only do they have no choice but to repay the debt; if they are " free" of that, they have to hide in order not to be caught by the police (hunting for people with a different face), and because they are illegal

they have to yield to any conditions for their exploitation. Two examples amongst numerous ones:

"

Quote:

...in April 1999, a SWAT9 team found seven sweatshops in a cluster of housing projects in the Paris suburb of Seine –Saint-Denis (north of Paris). By day, the small-scale factories operated legally, employing regular workers. By night, however, machines continued to hum, operated by illegal Asian immigrants, some of whom are compelled to work 105 hours a week".¹⁰

Quote:

"...From his arrival in Paris, Mr. Go is starting looking for a job. A garment workshop engaged him. As he knows nothing on this job, he has to be trained for one month without being paid. The second month, his wage is 460 Euros a month; he has to work from 8 am up to 3 am the next day morning. They are three to work in these conditions and they are forbidden to go out. Every time the boss is absent they are locked in the shop. Often, his nose is bleeding. For 23 days he was allowed to go out to phone to his family only once. Fed up with this situation, he left this job. He managed to find another employer who engages him for six months confiscating his passport. As he refuses this deal, he finds another job in a restaurant to do the washing up. He works 12 hours a day 6 days a week for 300 Euros a month. He can eat and sleep in the restaurant. His hands are totally destroyed and he still owes 9 000 Euros for the 'travel'...".¹¹

It is impossible to describe the working conditions of these Chinese immigrants often exploited by other Chinese (a matter of language), working long hours, seven days out of seven, living in the appalling conditions of sordid accommodation, not earning enough to provide food for them and their family, having to move from one job to another, from one sordid accommodation to another. They might not only work in underground sweatshops, they could also be obliged to take piece work at home.¹² Recently the Chinese entrepreneurs in France, mainly in the garment industry, had to confront the competition of textile from inland China. As an important part of the garment trade is based on import-export through clan, family and business connections, the sweatshop garment underground factory had been transformed to become only the adapting factor of this general trade which means worse working conditions (mainly longer hours of work for a short time and periods of unemployment) because orders had to be satisfied immediately and an extension to piece labour at home. This gives the measure not only of the hardship of labour but of its precariousness. Of course, their appalling conditions of working and living leave the weakest immigrants open to any disease (not to mention injuries at work); if they can go to the hospital for the most serious injuries or diseases they have to find a makeshift

solution and often they are fired immediately with no possibility to ask for anything.

The economic sectors where the illegal immigrants could find work are only the sectors where Chinese entrepreneurs have developed their business; this situation obliged these workers to stay in limited districts more like prisoners in the town or the suburbs. These sectors are respectively: garment, restaurants and catering, domestic services and building trade. Historically, the concentration in some specific sectors of activity was connected to the labour market, to the social segregation and to administrative barriers. It is more the consequence of economic opportunities and of sectors forbidden officially and for reasons of prejudice to foreign people, legal immigrants or not. So the illegal immigrants, if they have some qualification in their country, have to take any job only in these sectors, not being able to make a living with their professional skills, their situation even more restricted because of the narrow choice of sectors where they can find a job.

With the reinforced police hunt for undocumented immigrants, perhaps the number of immigrants could wither but on the other hand it allows the Chinese bosses to use this constant threat to impose even harder working conditions and low wages, with these exploited people being in a more vulnerable situation and therefore weaker.

This problem is also reinforced by the question of language: immigrants from Zhejiang speak the local dialect; generally those coming from south East Asia speaks Cantonese and those coming from the North of China speaks Mandarin. Beyond these three big divisions there are also some other linguistic limited communities, such as some shopkeeper coming from the province of Xiamen (South East of China) speaking a local dialect – Chaozhou.

Social life and resistance

The same question of language regulates social life (when working conditions and lack of money allow the minimum of social life). Naturally, the first and second waves of immigration have seen the rise of some traditional Chinese social organisations: associations, churches, rituals, traditional celebrations, schools etc. If this social life gives certainly the opportunity to weave some contacts and some solidarity, it is difficult to know how it works, the size of the organisations and their consequences on any resistance to the exploitation as a

whole.

More important are some attempts to organise undocumented Chinese immigrants in order to help them to get a regular permit to stay in France. Some committees were established for this aim. Generally they did not mix with illegal immigrants from other origins. Even in the demonstrations to try to influence the government, they stay between themselves in a group not mixing with the other demonstrators. In a certain way it is the beginning of a kind of class struggle, somewhat helped but not very much by some unions. If we can see in all that a certain form of class solidarity, on the other hand we could see as well the consequence of the need imposed by their peculiar situation to remain strongly connected to their specific milieu, the one providing all the conditions for their surviving in France.

The second generation of young Chinese is squeezed between the influence of the life in the country welcoming them and the cultural inheritance of their parents, a conflict reinforced by the strong cohesion of the various Chinese communities. The weight of the family customs is stronger because of the necessities of survival and the exploitation of labour, the immigration being seen only as a family and financial business in which every member has to comply. In this respect, education through public schooling is not seen as a means of integration but only as a means to help the family to settle around its professional activity. Often when the compulsory schooling period is finished these kids have to be inserted into the professional activity of the family, regardless of their school success.

Recently there was some solidarity for immigrants and especially for Chinese in very specific situations. Children of illegal immigrants are allowed to go to the French public schools, and as long as they are pupils they can't be expelled from France but their parents can. A spontaneous rank and file organisation of French parents was established around local schools to oppose the arrest of parents coming to collect their children at the school gate (the

"Education without borders network"). Violent clashes with the police sometimes occurred.

This network of active solidarity is taking care of any immigrant but, as in the Chinese districts of Paris, the police hunt mostly affects Chinese immigrants, it is they who are mainly involved in the resistance to it. In the other cases it is

obvious that a whole local population was opposing the extradition of illegals living and working in France for years.

In all this we can't think of class solidarity because this activity is more about humanitarian aims from all classes of the French society, even if this network has quickly spread all over France. It is not only about undocumented Chinese immigrants but about all kinds of

immigrants. But this active intervention of part of the French population can help them in their own struggle as exploited workers.

Footnotes

1 Contrary to some current ideas, censuses tried to estimate the scale of immigration as early as 1830. One census officially counted 180 000 Germans out of 380 000 immigrants in 1843, and 380 000 immigrants and 250 000 crossing the borders were recorded in 1851. In 1901, the presence of 400 000 Italians caused local conflicts -- sometimes violent ones -- with French population, mostly in period of crisis, particularly in the South of France. In 1911 the same census counted 1 1320 000 foreigners.

2 A law voted on the 8/8/1891 institute a "register for mobile activity" with the obligation to declare one's presence in any town or village. According to this law a 1895 census counted 400 000 tramps and 250 000 gypsies "living in gangs". A new law voted on the 16/7/1912

obliged "nomads, tramps and foreigners" qualified of "population potentially dangerous" to get a special anthropometric book. This law was modified only in...1969.

3 In 1880 some protectionist decrees were taken to stop the rural exodus for the sake of the political bourgeois domination and organising controlled immigration.

4 Some of these " worker-students" later became very famous. In Montargis there are still traces of the residence for some years of Zhou Enlai, Li Fuchun, Chen Yi, Ba Jin, Deng Xiaoping, Cai Hesen, Xiang Jinyu where they could also see Ho Chi Minh and Pol Pot. The small town has become a place of pilgrimage for Chinese tourists in France.

5 It was specified that the "volunteers" should come from the North of China, as they will suffer neither from the cold nor from the heat". But counter-propaganda (which some people think spread from the German concessions in China) forced the authorities to drop these conditions and to recruit the "volunteers" all over China and of course from Wenzhou where some network already existed.

6 Quite a lot of these "war volunteers" are buried in a special cemetery near the small town of Noyelles-sur-Mer (Somme in the north of France) also a place of pilgrimage for Chinese tourists (information about these involuntary immigrants on internet on the site "Noyelles").

A missionary having worked in China and used as an interpreter in the camps of "Chinese workers" has written in his memories that the camps were so close to the line of battle that the bombs came inside regularly, of course with dead and wounded (quoted in "Chinese in France, Homes et Migrations n° 1254, mars-avril 2005, p 10).

7 Financing all kind of operations by immigrants is provided by special financial Chinese system called tontine working unofficially out of the official banking circuit based on cash, on non written promises and implying the use of violence if something is going wrong.

8 What one immigrant would have to pay could be 12 000 Euros for one person or more according to length of the travel and more if some problems occurred on the way. For a family this amount could rise up to 60 000 Euros. All systems of payment could be seen, often half before leaving and the remainder by the family in China after safe arrival in France. But it is far more complicated in case of borrowing or if the payment of this remainder is delayed, in case of problems, often the result is slave work for years in France.

9 SWAT was special repressive team of policemen, tax and labour inspectors able, to list all kinds of violations of the law in these workshops.

10 Business Week, 27 November 2000,
www.businessweek.com/2000/00_48/h3709036.htm 11 Le trafic et l'exploitation des immigrants chinois en France, Gan Yun et Véronique Poisson, BIT, 2005

12 It is difficult to know exactly , not only the wages of "permanent" workers but also the rate of piece work because all the illegal immigrants have to "accept" what the boss imposes on them and chiefly how much they are paid. For

day work, the wage can vary from 300

Euros monthly up to 5/600 Euros for 12 hours six days a week. Piecework could be textile work but also production for restaurants for instance raviolis. To get the same minimum money an immigrant on piecework has to work from early morning up to midnight every day.

Article published in Échanges et Mouvement #121, summer 2007

www.prol-position.net